DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 458 497 CG 031 386

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TITLE Ethnic Identity among Guatemalan Youth.
PUB DATE 2001-08-00
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (109th, San Francisco, CA, August 24-28, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; Cross Cultural Studies; *Emotional Adjustment; *Ethnicity; Foreign Countries; *Identification (Psychology); Psychological Patterns; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Students; Secondary Schools; Self Esteem; Social Cognition; Student Surveys
IDENTIFIERS Guatemala

ABSTRACT

Ethnic identity was studied among Guatemalan youth to determine whether the intensity of ethnic identity is associated with psychological adjustment, as measured by self-esteem and attitudes towards people outside their ethnic group. One hundred and thirty-seven students (65 males, 72 females) in grades 7 through 12 and ranged in age from 12 to 17 participated in the study. The results showed that two components of ethnic identity, exploration and feelings, correlated significantly with each other. Measures of both components of ethnic identity were positively and significantly associated with self esteem as well as positive attitudes towards people outside one's own ethnic group. The results were similar to results reported among American youth. Thus, despite cultural and historic differences between the two countries, youth in both places showed similar patterns of correlations between ethnic identification and measures of adjustment. (Contains 4 figures and 11 references.) (JDM)

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Ethnic Identity Among Guatemalan Youth

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Introduction

In Guatemala, *ethnic identity* plays a significant role in society because the country is populated by many different indigenous groups, accounting altogether for 46% of the population, as well as others, usually referred to as Ladinos. We will report the results of research about ethnic identity among Guatemalan youth to determine if intensity of ethnic identity is associated with psychological adjustment, as measured by self-esteem and attitudes towards people outside their ethnic group. Research about ethnic identity in Guatemala is not only valuable because Guatemala has such a diverse population, but also because Guatemala is engaging in the Peace Process after decades of Civil War during which some Ladino groups engaged in extended conflict with several indigenous groups. Are Guatemalan youths avoiding strong

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attachments to their ethnic identities out of fear of conflict or are they now free to explore and affirm their own heritage?

Definitions of ethnic identity vary and there is little consensus among scholars representing different disciplines, notably psychology, anthropology, and sociology. According to Tajfel (1981) ethnic identity "is a part of the self concept that is developed in the individual, which comes from his or her knowledge of and affinity for a group (or groups) through the value and emotional meaning of belonging." Other scholars focus on cultural aspects of ethnic groups, such as language, behavior and knowledge of the ethnic group's history (Teske and Nelson, 1973; Singh, 1977; Ting - Tooney, 1981; Parham and Helms, 1981; White and Burke 1987).

For purposes of this study, we define members of an ethnic group as people who share certain beliefs, values, habits, customs and norms that are different from other groups. In addition, in order to define oneself as a member of an ethnic group, an individual is required to be conscious of the emotional meaning and value of belonging to that group (Phinney, 1992).

While ethnic identity can develop and change throughout life, it emerges first in adolescence and the strength of this identity can influence the life of adolescents (Phinney, 1990). During this period,

adolescents begin to relate to others on their own terms, beyond the control of their parents.

According to Phinney (1992), ethnic identity can be divided into two components including one that represents an individual's exploration of the ethnic group's history, language, and customs and another component that represents an individual's feelings about and sense of belonging to the group.

An important consideration in an individual's development of ethnic identity is his or her orientation towards others. In the U.S., adolescents with strong ethnic identities have been found to be more positive toward people of other ethnic groups (Roberts, Phinney, Masse, Chen, Roberts, and Romero, 1999). But it is unclear whether this finding is universal or the unique consequence of the U.S. History. Would intensity of ethnic identity be positively related to positive attitudes towards members of other groups in a country that has just ended a Civil War?

Furthermore, in such a context, would dimensions of ethnic identity be positively related to self-esteem? In the U.S., scales measuring ethnic knowledge and ethnic feelings have been positively related to self-esteem. But, in Guatemala, some indigenous groups might feel intimidated by years of persecution. Would the intensity of

ethnic identity in Guatemala be positively and significantly related to self-esteem?

Methodology

Sample. On hundred and thirty seven youth, 65 males (47.4%) and 72 females (52.6%), ranging in age from 12 to 17 years, participated in this study by completing several questionnaires. The ethnic distribution was as follows: K'iche (35.0%), Q'eqchi' (24.1%), Ladino (21.2%) and Kaqchiquel (19.7%). The participants in the sample were students from fifth to twelfth grades in five public schools from Chimaltenango, Solola, Totonicapan and Alta Verapaz.

Procedure. Two measurement instruments were used. The first was a Guatemalan adaptation of the "Multi Ethnic Identity Measurement" (Phinney, 1992). This instrument contained three scales measuring: (1) ethnic identity achievement (exploration), (2) ethnic feelings and pride, (3) out-group orientation. Each item was measured by a scale ranging from 1 (low) and 5 (high).

The second instrument administered was the "Coopersmith Self-esteem Inventory," designed by Stanley Coopersmith (1967) and validated for Guatemala (García, 1998). Although this scale has many subscales, the total self-esteem score will be considered here.

Results

The means and standard deviations of the scale scores are presented in Table 1, broken down by ethnic groups and gender.

TABLE 1

Descriptive Statistics for Scale Scores by Ethnic Group and Gender

	Kaqchiqueles		K'iche		Ladino		O'egchi'	
Total	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**Mean**	**S.D.**
Identity Exploration	27.5	5.5	26.3	6.0	24.4	7.9	25.1	6.9
Feelings & Belonging	27.4	4.6	28.6	4.9	29.7	4.3	27.3	5.4
Out-Group	28.5	5.7	29.9	5.2	29.9	6.5	26.8	8.4
Self-esteem	63.6	11.5	60.9	10.9	58.0	15.5	57.7	11.8
Males								
Identity Exploration	26.7	5.1	25.5	12.0	27.0	8.3	27.8	6.8
Feelings & Belonging	27.7	4.4	29.2	6.4	30.9	3.2	27.8	5.4
Out-Group	30.1	5.2	30.9	5.3	31.9	4.7	29.2	8.1
Self-esteem	70.4	8.5	61.0	4.9	61.0	14.9	56.8	13.8
Females								
Identity Exploration	27.9	5.8	27.0	10.0	21.7	6.9	21.4	5.1
Feelings & Belonging	27.2	4.9	28.0	5.7	28.6	5.1	26.7	5.6
Out-Group	27.5	5.8	29.1	4.5	28.2	7.6	23.6	7.9
Self-esteem	60.0	11.5	60.7	5.3	55.2	15.9	59.0	8.6

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A series of correlations were computed between the four scale scores and the results are presented in Table 2. Correlations that were statistically significant are presented in bold.

TABLE 2

Correlations Between Scale Scores for Total Sample

	Feelings & Belonging	**Out-Group orientation**	**Self Esteem**
TOTAL SAMPLE			
Identity Exploration	**0.294****	**0.193***	**0.322****
Feelings & Belonging		**0.521****	**0.327****
Out-Group Orientation			**0.355****

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

The results in Table 2 indicate that all these scales were positively correlated with each other. This finding suggests, for example, that ethnic identity, measured either in terms of exploration or feelings, is positively related to a positive orientation toward

people of other ethnic groups. Furthermore, this finding suggests that ethnic identity, regardless of whether it reflects exploration or feelings about one's ethnic group, is also positively related to self-esteem.

In terms of statistical significance, the results from the total sample indicate that the knowledge component of ethnic identity is significantly correlated with the feelings component of ethnic identity, although the two scores are not strongly correlated. These two components of ethnic identity seem to measure something distinct about ethnic identification, as shown by their different degrees of correlation with out-group orientation. That is, we found that exploration has a small correlation with out-group orientation, but that feelings about one's ethnic group has a much stronger association with out-group orientation. Note also that greater positivity towards oneself was associated with greater positivity towards others.

Table 3

Correlations between Scale Scores by Ethnic Group

		Feelings	Out-	S-esteem
K'iche	Identity	**0.322***	0.213	**0.419****
	Feelings &		**0.576****	0.265
	Out-group			0.302
Kaqchiquel	Identity	0.213	0.138	0.251
	Feelings &		**0.453***	**0.401***
	Out-group			0.342
Ladino	Identity	**0.414***	0.310	**0.465***
	Feelings &		**0.511****	0.176
	Out-group			**0.477***
Q'eqchi'	Identity	0.057	0.199	0.189
	Feelings &		**0.651****	**0.512****
	Out-group			**0.386***

* $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$

The general pattern of correlations found with the total sample was repeated within each of the ethnic groups, with one exception. The correlations between scores reflecting ethnic exploration among the Q'eqchi' were much weaker than the correlations for the other groups. At present we do not know why this happened, although we note that the

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out-group and self-esteem scores of this group are lower than the scores of the other groups.

We also conducted the same types of correlations between scale scores separately for boys and girls. The results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4

Correlations between Scale Scores by Gender

	Feelings &Belonging	Out-Group Orientation	Self Esteem
MALES			
Ethnic Identity Achievement	**0.293***	0.182	**0.336****
Feelings & Belonging		**0.524****	**0.285***
Out-Group Orientation			**0.355****
FEMALES			
Ethnic Identity Achievement	**0.275***	**0.182**	**0.293***
Feelings & Belonging		**0.502****	**0.319****
Out Group Orientation			**0.301***

*p < 0.05 **p < 0.01

The results in Table 4 indicate that the pattern of correlations for both male and female adolescents was similar.

Discussion

These results overall are highly similar to those found in a variety of settings within the U.S. We found that the two components of ethnic identity, exploration and feelings, were correlated significantly with each other and this is similar to findings among American youth (Roberts et al, 1999). Likewise, we found that measures of both components of ethnic identity in Guatemalan youth are positively and significantly associated with self-esteem as well as positive attitudes towards people outside one's own ethnic group. This is also similar to results reported among American youth (Roberts et al, 1999). Thus, despite the cultural and historic differences between the U.S. and Guatemala in ethnic relations, contemporary youth in both countries show similar patterns of correlations between ethnic identification and measures of adjustment.

One difference between our findings and those typically reported by American studies of American youth is the relative strength of the ethnic identification of the predominant group in Guatemala, the Ladinos. In the U.S., youth of European ancestry generally have much

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lower ethnic identity scores than other American youths. This has been explained in terms of the dominance of European Americans in the U.S. However, in our study, the Ladino youth scores were within the same range as the other groups, with slightly lower exploration scores and slightly higher feelings scores than the scores of youths from three indigenous groups. Perhaps Ladino youth are more aware of their ethnicity than are U.S. youth of European ancestry because Ladino youth live in a much more diverse society in which ethnicity has been highly salient. If this interpretation is valid, then our Guatemalan results suggest that U.S. youth of European ancestry may begin to become more identified with their ethnic group as their neighborhoods and cities become more ethnically diverse.

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